

# SWEET CLOVER

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SWEET CLOVER MAKES EXCELLENT LATE SUMMER AND FALL PASTURE

## SWEET CLOVER

**Sweet clover not a pest.**—Not long ago farmers everywhere were alarmed over the rapid progress that sweet clover seemed to be making and they were using every effort to exterminate it. Today it is considered a highly desirable crop and is being used more extensively each year as a cultivated crop.

There are several kinds of sweet clover, but perhaps the one that is best adapted for Ohio conditions is the white flowered variety, *Melilotus alba*. This is a biennial, coming up from seed one year and producing seed the following year, after which the plant dies.

### **Sweet clover grown for several purposes:**

(1) Sweet clover is grown by a great many farmers strictly as a soil improver. It is admirably adapted for this purpose, as it makes a deep root growth quite rapidly, and being a legume adds nitrogen to the soil.

(2) Other farmers are growing sweet clover for a pasture crop and it is valuable for this purpose since it comes into growth earlier than any other crop in spring and is quite resistant to dry weather, growing all thru the summer.

(3) Sweet clover serves an important place as a hay crop, as a cutting of hay can usually be made the same year the seed is sown, and one or two cuttings of hay can be secured the following year.

(4) As a seed crop sweet clover is worthy of consideration, since it seeds rather heavily, and when the crop is properly handled from 2 to 10 bushels of seed may be secured per acre.

**When and how to seed.**—Sweet clover should have a very compact seedbed. Usually it is best to sow sweet clover seed on wheat or rye in the spring in the same manner that red clover is sown.

A good method of seeding sweet clover is by means of the disk grain drill or regular disk seeder, on wheat or on rye in spring. If this method is used it will be necessary to wait until the land is in condition to get on it with a team.

If the seed is to be sown broadcast it should be sown quite early, so there may be ample opportunity for freezing and thawing of the soil after sowing to aid in softening the hard seed coat. February is preferable to March or April.

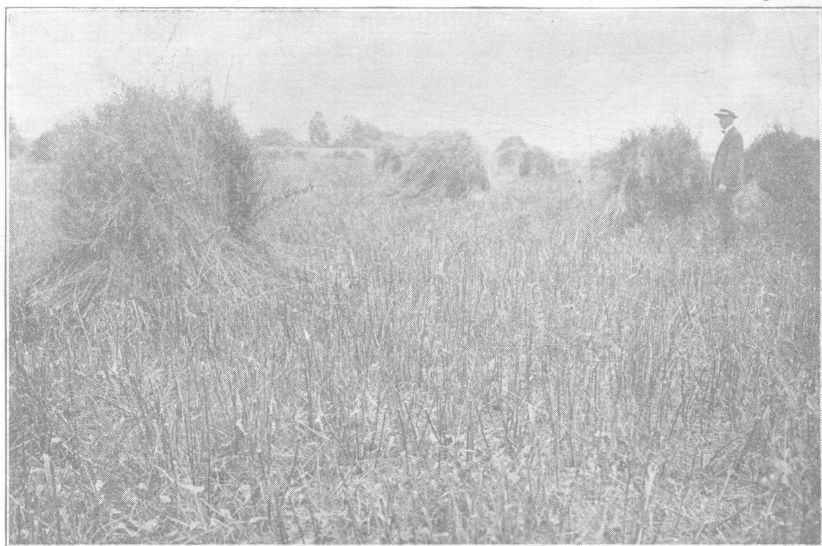
**Kind and amount of seed to sow.**—For Ohio conditions it is generally found that the re-cleaned scarified seed gives best results. When this seed is used and sown early with the broadcast seeder 10 or 12 pounds per acre should be sown. If it is drilled so that all the seeds are covered, 7 or 8 pounds of seed should be sufficient.

The amount of seed to sow will depend to a considerable extent on the germination of the seed. Sweet clover usually has rather a high percentage of hard seed which will not germinate the first year. It is, therefore, quite important that the seed be scarified. Seedsmen quite generally can supply scarified seed if they are asked to do so.

**Inoculation important.**—If sweet clover is to be grown on a field for the first time it is usually quite necessary to provide inoculation. Perhaps the easiest way to do this is to sow inoculated seed. The seed

may be inoculated by the use of pure cultures that are put on the market by many commercial companies, or by the use of soil from another field of sweet clover or from a field where alfalfa has grown successfully.

Only a small quantity of soil need be used. The seed should be moistened with water in which a small quantity of glue has been dissolved (1 teaspoon to a pint of water) and the finely sifted soil sprinkled on the moist seed and stirred thru it thoroly. This will make the seed look dusty, but there will not be enough dirt to interfere at all with seeding operations. One pint of soil should be enough for 1 or 2 bushels of seed.



Sweet clover is a profitable crop when grown and harvested for seed

**Sweet clover as a hay crop.**—If sweet clover is sown in spring on wheat or rye it will usually happen that a hay crop may be cut that same fall. This will not make a heavy hay crop, but will probably run from  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 ton per acre. This will be very fine hay, fully equal to alfalfa or red clover.

The following spring the sweet clover will come into growth quiet early and be large enough to cut for hay by the first of June. The mistake has often been made of allowing this crop to get too big before cutting for hay. It should be cut before it is ready to bloom, or when it is about 2 feet high. It should be cut high enough so that there are plenty of green branches left on the stubble, otherwise it will be killed, as the new growth does not come out from the crown as it does in alfalfa.

When it is cut early as described the second growth will come on, and can be cut again for hay or allowed to mature a seed crop.

Sweet clover is somewhat hard to cure for hay, as it makes a very succulent growth. The feeding value of sweet clover hay has been found to be about equal to alfalfa or red clover.

**Sweet clover as a pasture crop.**—For a pasture crop sweet clover fits in very nicely, as it furnishes splendid pasture the first year it is sown and at a time of the year when bluegrass pastures are quite short and perhaps burned out.

Sweet clover does not ordinarily make much growth until after the grain crop with which it is seeded is harvested, but after this time the sweet clover comes on quite rapidly and continues to grow until late fall, so that it can be depended upon to furnish good pasture during the late summer and early fall.

The next year's crop may be pastured, and indeed it furnishes abundant pasture, but it should be pastured heavily enough to keep it from growing tall and woody. If it is desirable to have a permanent pasture of sweet clover it will be necessary to allow some of the crop to form seed and reseed itself, else it will die out after the second year's growth.

**Sweet clover as a seed crop.**—There are a few farmers in Ohio who are growing sweet clover primarily as a seed crop. When growing it for this purpose it is well not to have an exceedingly thick stand. It is seeded on wheat or rye as previously described. A hay crop could be cut in the fall if it is desirable to do so, but unless the hay crop is needed nothing more is done to it until the following spring. To insure a seed crop, the first growth is allowed to grow and mature seed rather than attempt to secure both a hay crop and seed crop.

Sweet clover often makes a very large growth, and hence is quite hard to handle with harvesting and threshing machinery if the first growth is not checked by pasturing or clipping. Hence it is sometimes wise to pasture the crop for a while in spring or to clip it, provided it is not pastured too heavily. In case it is clipped, the clipping must be done early, and high enough so that there is no danger of killing the plants. The second growth will then come on from buds on the lower branches and produce a shorter, finer stemmed growth than the first crop makes.

The ordinary grain binder is the most satisfactory machine with which to harvest the crop. Care must be exercised in cutting it so that it is not too dry or it will shatter badly. In the west it is customary to fit up the binder with pans to catch the shattered seed. If it is cut rather early in the mornings or in damp weather very little shattering will occur.

Probably the best way to thresh the seed is to run it first thru a regular grain thresher and then thru a clover huller. Yields of seed vary from 2 to 10 bushels per acre.

**Sweet clover fits into rotations.**—Because sweet clover is a legume and can be handled in much the same way that red clover or alfalfa is handled, there is no reason why it cannot be used in any of the regular rotations practiced in Ohio. Sweet clover possesses some advantages that other legumes do not. It does not require a fertile soil or one that is well supplied with organic matter. It will not succeed in an acid soil but does not require a particularly well drained soil, and therefore it will often do well where alfalfa and red clover refuse to grow. Sweet clover does not seem to be susceptible to the attacks of so many fungous diseases and insect pests as are red clover and alfalfa.